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ABSTRACT

The development cf Federal requirements for parent involvement, via Title I, in cooperative educaticn and pclicy making roles is reviewed chronolcgically. Variaticns ir the implementation of plans to invclve parents are examined for 15 lccal schccl districts in 14 states. The survey instrument and the sampling technique utilized for explcring parental invclvement in decision making processes in these schools are cutlined. The administration of the instrument is described. Specifically examined were the levels at which parents were perceived (by themselves and by school administrators) to participate in educaticnal decisicn making. In addition, an attempt was made tc determine the degree of congruence between levels at which parents "should be" invclved and levels at which they "are presently" involved. (Author/GC)

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EDUCATIONAL DECISION-MAKING: THE INVOLVEMENT OF PARENTS - MYTH OR REALITY

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INTRODUCTION

This paper will present a chronological review of the development of Federal requirements for parent involvement (via Title I, ESEA) followed by an examination of the variations in implementation. A major task is to report results of a study undertaken during the 1975-76 school year which analyzed the perceptions of Title I coordinators and parent advisory council members regarding ideal and actual levels of parent involvement in educational decision-making. Conclusions will be drawn from the results of the study, followed by recommendations for future research efforts.

BACKGROUND

One of the most significant trends in education over the last decade has been the increase in parent participation and involvement in various cooperative educational and policy-making roles. This trend received much support from an array of compensatory education programs authorized by Congress during the mid 1960's. Implicit in federal compensatory education programs are assumptions about the nature of school and learning and the role of parents in that process.

Federal officials began urging local educational agencies to involve parents and other interested community members soon after the enactment of the original Title I legislation, but there were

no formal requirements for parent involvement. ESEA Title I Program Guide Number 46-A recommended establishment of local advisory councils. Public Law 91-230, passed in 1970, resulted in the amending of federal guidelines to require establishment of parent councils for school districts with Title I programs.

The most recent reaffirmation of the need for parent involvement is seen in the Education Amendments of 1974. At that time Congress enacted the amendments of Title I which (1) expressly provide for the involvement of parents in the "planning for, and the implementation and evaluation of" Title I programs and projects; and (2) require that LEA's (public school districts) establish PAC's at each school served by Title I in addition to district-wide PAC's. Furthermore, the Title I legislation, as amended in 1974, provides that each advisory council (1) must have as a majority of its members parents of children to be served, (2) must be composed of members selected by the parents, and (3) must be provided in accordance with regulations of the Commissioner, with access to appropriate information concerning such programs and projects.

According to Title I regulations signed by the Secretary of HEW on September 16, 1976, "The purpose of the advisory councils is to encourage parental involvement at the local level as an important means of increasing the effectiveness of programs under Title I" (U.S. Code of Federal Regulations, 1976:42920).

Under these regulations, the SEA may approve only those applications that show evidence of "significant" parental involvement.

Although the Title I guidelines permit and encourage all kinds of parent involvement, little attention is given to effecting specific improvements in the direct interaction between parent and

child. Rather, the focus is on increasing the effectiveness with which parents can influence decisions made by local school districts.

While "paper" mandates emanating from the federal level set forth a variety of ways and degrees in which parents are to be involved in the education of their children, such requirements are implemented variously, depending on interpretations made and expectations held by the various program personnel at the state, local district, and school-site levels.

Implementation of Requirements for Parent Involvement

"Almost all of the LEA's needed to increase the involvement of parents of Title I children in their program. Maximizing parental involvement could help to increase the program's responsiveness to the needs of the children." So concluded the United States Comptroller General in his recent report to the Congress (1975).

In the study to which he refers, the General Accounting Office of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare reviewed special Title I reading projects of fifteen local school districts in fourteen states. Although all fifteen LEA's had established parent advisory councils and generally had some parental involvement, thirteen of the fifteen LEA's needed to "...extensively increase parental involvement in planning, operating, and evaluating their Title I projects" (U.S. Comptroller General, 1975:36).

McLaughlin (1975) conducted a study in which he and his coworkers were unable to locate an evaluation that indicated a parent advisory council functioning as intended by law. In a large number of instances, the parents who "...do find themselves on

DAC's (district advisory councils) are either (1) hand-picked by school officials for their past 'cooperation'; or (2) also employed by the school system as a teacher's aide and thus owe their job to the school system; or (3) never told of their membership" (1975:21).

Wilson Riles, Superintendent of Public Instruction for the state of California, agreed some time ago that there have been instances of "paper" committees that meet infrequently at a beckoning of the school district to fulfill the federal requirement (Riles, 1968). In such cases the school district usually selects only friendly members and carefully avoids parents and community members who may question the status quo.

Since that time, Superintendent Riles has built in parent participation as an integral part of each of his three major reform efforts: (1) Early Childhood Education (ECE) initiated in schools in September, 1973, to reform and restructure K-3 education in California; (2) the Master Plan for Special Education, initiated in September, 1975, to reform educational programming designed to serve California youngsters with exceptional needs; and (3) the Reform of Intermediate and Secondary Education (RISE). Substantive parent involvement is seen as a way to assure high quality in each reform effort (Webster and Brynelson, 1976).

Many administrators insist that, while they "believe in" parent participation, parents simply refuse to become involved. For three consecutive years Title I coordinators in the state of Arizona cite parent involvement as their most difficult task (Arizona Department of Education, 1975).

The National Advisory Council on the Education of Disadvantaged Children reports annually to the President and the Congress. The council has evaluated the progress and impact of parent involvement since 1970 and, in 1974, developed an instrument to gather information on parent advisory councils and an overall view of the general reaction of the advisory role.

While the overall view of school officials regarding the effect parents have on a child's educational attainment in most instances was favorable, there was still some evidence wherein school officials disapprove of parent participation and view parents as a threat to the school system's security.

In their report to the Congress in 1974, the Council recommended parent advisory councils on a school-by-school, as well as district-wide, basis to ensure accountability to the parents of the children to be served. Acceptance of such recommendation was reflected in Title I, as amended by the Education Amendments of 1974.

Several national or regional groups or organizations have sprung up in response to the increasing need for assistance in implementing requirements for parent involvement in educational decision-making; one of the most recent, and potentially powerful, is the National Coalition of Title I Parents. Established in January of 1973, the coalition initially operated as a small, informal group of active Title I parents who had attended a national conference hosted by the NACEDC held in 1973, at Washington, D.C. At the end of the conference the fifty conferees formulated, debated, and ultimately passed several dozen resolutions concerning the future of parent involvement in Title I. One of these resolutions

called for the establishment of the National Coalition for ESEA Title I Parents. Since that time, the Coalition has sponsored four annual meetings, the most recent of which attracted some three thousand parents from across the country.

The Federal Education Project, run by the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, is making Title I programs accountable by informing parents and local groups of the requirements of the program, monitoring the program, and initiating lawsuits to correct abuses (Citizen Action in Education, 1976:14).

Endorsement of mandates for stepped-up involvement of parents in educational decision-making has been given by significant groups and individuals: In exploring proposals for less known approaches to compensatory education, the National Institute of Education (1975) found a uniform and strong commitment to involving parents and the community (NIE, 1975:35).

In his opening message to the Thirty-second Arizona Legislature, Governor Raul Castro stated that "...new laws are needed to provide for parental participation in our schools from the kindergarten to the third grade level" (1976:6).

And finally, President Carter: "I am for the maximum feasible involvement of parents in educational decision-making. My administration would do its utmost to encourage such parental participation." (Network: The Paper for Parents, 1976:5)

Thus, it is clear that, while implementation of requirements for parent involvement has been sporadic and uneven at the local level, the concept has gained increasingly stronger endorsement at state and federal levels. Few studies have attempted to determine

the extent to which parents actually are involved in the decision-making process; since such involvement clearly is the intent of the legislation, studies examining the involvement of parents in this process clearly are warranted.

METHODS

Population and Samples

Because of the accessibility of participants, Arizona was selected as the state in which to conduct the study. The fiscal year 1976 Arizona Department of Education Title I Directory (1975a) was used to compile a list of participating districts. This source provides information concerning the names of school districts having Title I programs, the coordinators of the programs, and the type of program operating in each district. Individual district applications were used to identify members serving on school-site and district-wide parent advisory councils. In order to receive state approval for program funds, such applications must provide current information on each council member, including name, address, school represented, and area of representation, i.e., public or nonpublic.

Inasmuch as the total population consisted of only 150 district-level coordinators, it was determined that the entire population would be included in the study.

To be sure that the proportion of parents sampled would respond in a fashion that comes within 5 percentage points (with 90 percent certainty) of what the results would have been if all parents had been asked, a Krejcie and Margan (1970) table for determining sample size from a given population was used in this study.

With 1,734 parents identified on advisory councils, a sample size of 320 was required. Minium's (1970) table of random numbers was used to assign parents to one of two samples to assess perceptions of ideal parent involvement or perceptions of actual parent involvement.

Two additional samples of the same size (160 each) were drawn in order to accomplish the test/retest method of establishing instrument reliability. In sum, then, four samples of equal size were drawn from the population under study. A parallel approach was used in the assignment of coordinators to sample groups.

Instrumentation

In designing the Parent Decision-Making Survey, a major task was to develop a series of statements that could be used to obtain perceptions of varying levels or degrees of parent involvement in decision-making activities.

For purposes of this study, there were four categories of dependent measures around which the questionnaire items were clustered: Management/Budget; Personnel; Pupil/Instructional Services; and School/Community Relations.

From the research findings and literature previously cited, a preliminary list of approximately forty-five items was developed. The items were clustered around the four identified categories and submitted to several groups of critics. The groups consisted of officials from the Arizona State Department of Education as well as the United States Office of Education, and parents from various PAC's in Arizona. All of these individuals had had prior experience

working with Title I to increase parent involvement in educational activities.

The comments of these judges fell into the following areas: (1) the appropriateness of the items to the major dimensions; (2) the duplication or omission of certain important items; and (3) the phraseology of the items in terms of clarity of meaning. As a result of these evaluations, the questionnaire was reduced from forty-five items to thirty-two items. Also, a number of modifications in the language were made.

As a final step in the development of the instrument, the refined version was administered to Arizona State Department of Education's Title I professional staff and parent advisory council members not selected to be involved in the study. An attempt was made in this draft to hold the total time for questionnaire completion to approximately fifteen minutes. The respondents were asked to make any suggestions or criticisms with respect to the four categories as well as the wording of the item statements. The final form of the Parent Decision-Making Survey consists of twenty-five items. Both Edwards (1957:152) and Goodenough (1949) have strongly advocated the inclusion of at least twenty statements and no more than forty when the Likert Technique is employed to measure attitudes.

One of the major complications in the analysis of decision-making in organizations is that involvement may be differential in nature. Findings from studies on analysis of decision-making have revealed, for example, that individuals may be involved at a high level in decision-making on matters they perceive as low priorities,

yet they may be only minimally involved, if at all, in making some decisions that they perceive as important (Wendlandt, 1970).

For purposes of this study, the concept of ideal involvement was operationalized by defining the twenty-five selected tasks performed by school district administrators in the four categories previously mentioned.

The levels of actual involvement were determined using the same tasks. Two different decision-making behaviors--"ideal" and "actual"--emerge by a simple modification of the verb tense in each of the descriptive statements and a modification of the instructions to respondents. Thus, two instruments are available for measuring level of decision-making behavior, "ideal" and "actual."

The scale used was based upon the technique developed by Likert (1961:120). It relies upon a method of scoring whereby values of 5 to 1 are assigned to each of the five level-of-involvement positions according to the respective responses of "make the decision," "approve or disapprove decision," "make suggestions," "informed of decision," and "no involvement."

Validation of the Instrument

Since this questionnaire was based on the extent to which parents are involved in education decision-making, it was appropriate to adopt content validity for purposes of determining whether it would measure what was supposed to be measured. The content validity of the instrument used in this study was determined through the use of a pilot study in which a panel of five experts in parent involvement were asked to rate each item on the questionnaire in terms

of content validity, clarity, and suitability on a rating form. The results of the pilot study were used to modify the prototype instrument in preparation for actual instrument administration.

Reliability of the Instrument

For purposes of this study, instrument reliability was determined through the use of one of the more basic and simple techniques, test/retest.

A Pearson product-moment correlation was computed between the two sets of scores for each of the test items. The mean correlation for the "Actual" form of the survey was .9568, while the mean correlation for the "Actual" version of the survey was .9242.

Background Data Sheets

In addition to the survey instrument, background data sheets were completed by parents and coordinators. Information requested of both groups included the areas of sex, ethnic background, and level of education. Parents were asked additional questions relating to their membership on the parent council, e.g., length of membership, method of selection, role on council, and family income. Information requests unique to the coordinators sought primarily to determine kinds and levels of administrative experience.

RESULTS

Coordinators responded to twenty-five items clustered around four areas of administrative concern. These areas were (1) Management and Budget, (2) Personnel, (3) Pupil Instructional Services,

and (4) Community Involvement. In Table 1 are presented sample statistics representing the actual responses by each of the four composite scores.

Table 2 presents corresponding sample statistics for parents. In comparing sample variances, it can be seen from Table 3 that in one area, Pupil Instructional Services, the variances were found to be significantly different; thus, the assumption of homogeneity could not be made. In view of this finding, Cochran's approximation was used to compare the means for the parent scores in the area of Pupil Instructional Services.

Table 4 presents a comparison of variances of ideal and actual scores for both coordinators and parents. It can be seen that in two areas, Personnel and Pupil Instructional Services, the variances of scores on the "Ideal" items were significantly different for the two respondent groups. Thus, Cochran's approximation again would be used to test for significance between the means of the groups in these areas.

Hypothesis 1. There is no significant difference between ideal and actual levels of parent involvement in educational decision-making as perceived by school district Title I coordinators.

Table 5 presents the results of comparisons of means for "ideal" and "actual" involvement. For the first three composite scores, Management and Budget, Personnel, and Pupil Instructional Services, there were no significant differences between the sample means. For Community Involvement, however, it was found that, at the .05 level of significance, the means were significantly different. Based on the overall mean differences, the null hypothesis could not be rejected.

TABLE 1

Ideal and Actual Cases, Means, Standard Deviations, and Standard Errors for Title I Coordinators Responding to the Parent Decision-Making Survey

Domain	Group	Sample Size	Mean	S.D.	S.E.
Management and Budget	Actual	32	2.45	0.98	0.17
	Ideal	31	2.42	0.78	0.14
Personnel	Actual	32	2.24	0.75	0.13
	Ideal	31	2.42	0.73	0.13
Pupil Instructional Services	Actual	32	2.46	0.70	0.12
	Ideal	31	2.81	0.65	0.12
Community Involvement	Actual	32	3.56	0.93	0.16
	Ideal	31	4.04	0.80	0.14

TABLE 2

Ideal and Actual Cases, Means, Standard Deviations, and Standard Errors for Parents Responding to the Parent Decision-Making Survey

Domain	Group	Sample Size	Mean	S.D.	S.E.
Management and Budget	Actual	10	2.13	0.64	0.20
	Ideal	25	3.08	1.06	0.21
Personnel	Actual	10	2.27	0.94	0.30
	Ideal	25	2.86	1.04	0.21
Pupil Instructional Services	Actual	10	2.09	0.54	0.16
	Ideal	25	2.74	0.91	0.18
Community Involvement	Actual	10	3.71	0.96	0.31
	Ideal	25	3.64	1.00	0.19

TABLE 3

Summary Analysis of Variance for Domains of Parent Decision-Making Survey, with Cases and F Statistics for Parent Advisory Council Members in Arizona

Domain	Group	Sample Size	Variance	F Statistic
Management and Budget	Actual	10	0.413	2.73 N.S.
	Ideal	25	1.128	
Personnel	Actual	10	0.889	1.22 N.S.
	Ideal	25	1.088	
Pupil Instructional Services	Actual	10	0.263	3.13*
	Ideal	25	0.823	
Community Involvement	Actual	10	0.990	1.07 N.S.
	Ideal	25	0.924	

N.S. = nonsignificant.

* = significant; $\alpha = 0.05$.

TABLE 4

Summary Analysis of Variance for Domains of Parent Decision-Making Survey, with Cases and F Statistics for Title I Coordinators and Parent Advisory Council Members in Arizona

Domain	Group	Coordinators	Parents	F Statistic
Management and Budget	Actual	0.964	0.410	2.35 N.S.
	Ideal	0.607	1.124	1.85 N.S.
Personnel	Actual	0.557	0.884	1.59 N.S.
	Ideal	0.537	1.082	2.01*
Pupil Instructional Services	Actual	0.491	0.260	1.89 N.S.
	Ideal	0.421	0.828	1.97*
Community Involvement	Actual	0.929	1.000	1.08 N.S.
	Ideal	0.795	0.922	1.16 N.S.

N.S. = nonsignificant at $\alpha = 0.05$.

* = significant at $\alpha = 0.05$.

TABLE 5

Comparison of Means, with Cases and t Statistics, for Title I Coordinators Responding to "Ideal" and "Actual" Forms of the Parent Decision-Making Survey

Domain	Group	Sample Size	Mean	t Statistic
Management and Budget	Actual	32	2.25	-0.76 N.S.
	Ideal	31	2.42	
Personnel	Actual	32	2.24	-0.99 N.S.
	Ideal	31	2.42	
Pupil Instructional Services	Actual	32	2.46	-0.30 N.S.
	Ideal	31	2.51	
Community Involvement	Actual	32	3.56	-2.20*
	Ideal	31	4.04	

N.S. = nonsignificant at $\alpha = 0.05$.

* = significant at $\alpha = 0.05$.

It should be noted, however, that, while the general hypothesis could not be rejected, in all cases the mean for the "ideal" sample is larger than that for the "actual."

Hypothesis 2. There is no significant difference between ideal and actual levels of parent involvement in educational decision-making as perceived by members of Title I parent advisory councils.

Based on analysis of the data reported in Table 6, the hypothesis could not be rejected. A significant difference was found in one area, Management and Budget. As in the case of coordinators, parents generally ranked "ideal" involvement higher than "actual." However, there was one exception in this group, where the mean score of "actual" involvement in the area of Community Involvement was higher than that for the "ideal" level of involvement in this area.

Hypothesis 3. There is no significant difference between perceptions held by members of Title I parent advisory councils and school district Title I coordinators of the ideal level of parent involvement in educational decision-making.

The hypothesis could not be rejected. Table 7 presents statistics that compare scores of coordinators with those of parents. It shows that there was no significant difference between "ideal" mean scores for the two groups in three of the four areas: Personnel, Pupil Instructional Services, and Community Involvement. There was a significant difference in the area of Management and Budget, where the mean for parents was significantly higher at the .05 level. It should be noted that coordinators had higher mean scores than parents in the areas of Pupil Instructional Services and Community Involvement.

TABLE 6

Comparison of Means, with Cases and *t* Statistics, for Parents Responding to "Ideal" and "Actual" Forms of the Parent Decision-Making Survey

Domain	Group	Sample Size	Mean	*t* Statistic
Management and Budget	Actual	10	2.13	2.63*
	Ideal	25	3.08	
Personnel	Actual	10	2.27	1.55 N.S.
	Ideal	25	2.86	
Pupil Instructional Services	Actual	10	2.09	2.12 N.S.
	Ideal	25	2.74	
Community Involvement	Actual	10	3.71	0.19 N.S.
	Ideal	25	3.64	

N.S. = nonsignificant at $\alpha = 0.05$.

* = significant at $\alpha = 0.05$.

TABLE 7

Comparison of Means for Title I Coordinators and Parent Advisory Council Members Responding to "Ideal" and "Actual" Forms of the Parent Decision-Making Survey

Domain	Group	Coordinators			Parents			t	
		N	Mean	S.D.	N	Mean	S.D.		
Management & Budget	Actual	32	2.25	0.98	10	2.13	0.64	0.36	N.S.
Personnel	Ideal	31	2.42	0.78	25	3.08	1.06	2.68*	
Personnel	Actual	32	2.24	0.75	10	2.27	0.94	0.10	N.S.
	Ideal	31	2.42	0.73	25	2.86	1.04	1.86	N.S.
Pupil Instruct. Services	Actual	32	2.46	0.75	10	2.09	0.51	1.54	N.S.
	Ideal	31	2.81	0.65	25	2.74	0.91	0.33	N.S.
Community Involvement	Actual	31	3.56	0.93	10	3.71	1.00	0.43	N.S.
	Ideal	32	4.04	0.80	25	3.64	0.96	1.70	N.S.

N.S. = nonsignificant at $\alpha = 0.05$.

* = significant at $\alpha = 0.05$.

Hypothesis 4. There is no significant difference between perceptions held by members of Title I parent advisory councils and school district Title I coordinators of the actual level of parent involvement in educational decision-making.

Table 7 reveals that there was no significant difference between parents' and coordinators' perceptions of the actual level of parent involvement in educational decision-making. A study of the mean score presented for each group in the table reveals, however, that the average for the coordinators was higher than that for the parents. In the areas of Management and Budget and Pupil Instructional Services, coordinators perceived parents as being involved at a higher level than did parents themselves, while the converse was true for the area of Community Involvement. Both groups did perceive parents as having the highest level of actual involvement in the area of Community Involvement, where the mean score was 3.67 and 3.56, respectively, for parents and coordinators.

The area of lowest actual involvement as perceived by parents was Pupil Instructional Services, while coordinators perceived the lowest level of parent involvement in matters dealing with Personnel.

CONCLUSIONS

Analysis of the data compiled for this study produced a number of general conclusions relevant to parent involvement in educational decision-making defined within an "ideal" and "actual" construct as perceived by two respondent populations. Because this study was limited to Arizona, and because the percent of returns from parents was lower than desired for purposes of statistical analysis, the

generalizability and implications of these conclusions should be viewed with caution.

1. The mailed questionnaire method is not effective as a means of obtaining data from parents.

2. In spite of federal mandates for parent involvement, Title I parent advisory councils still are likely to be "paper" councils.

3. A substantial majority of the participants attempting to influence school policy are women.

4. There is less than proportionate representation of the various ethnic groups serving on Title I parent advisory councils.

5. The combination of language and cultural differences coupled with physical isolation of American Indians in Arizona results in low or nonexistent involvement of such parents in educational decision-making.

6. The requirement for parent selection of advisory council members is not being met.

7. Title I coordinators are satisfied with the present level of parent involvement.

8. There is a potential source of conflict between parents and administrators in the area of Management and Budget. This conclusion is drawn from three findings of significant differences in this area:

(a) Ideal versus actual involvement as perceived by parents. Parents feel that they should be involved at a significantly higher level than they are at present.

(b) Actual involvement as perceived by parents and coordinators. Parents view themselves as presently being involved at a lower level than do coordinators.

(c) Ideal involvement as perceived by parents and coordinators. Parents feel that they should be involved at a higher level than do coordinators.

10. Parents are not interested in "taking over" the school system. Rather, they view their appropriate roles as one of giving advice or making suggestions. The mean score for ideal involvement tends to invalidate apprehensions of school administrators as reported in the research literature. The overall mean score of 3.06 corresponds to the level "make suggestions" on the survey instrument. This tends to support the belief expressed by Stanwick: "While there is evidence of quantitative increase...we see no reason to believe that parents and citizens have more power in decision-making in the schools" (emphasis added) (1975:7).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of this study and the consequent conclusions, the following recommendations are offered for future research efforts:

1. Extended research with larger numbers of parents which would increase the generalizability of statistical findings.

2. Examination of the interaction between size of district Title I program and duties of the program's administrator as they relate to perceptions of the appropriate role of parents in education.

3. Expanded research to include perceptions of teachers regarding parent involvement in educational decision-making.

4. Replication of the study with expansion of the research design to include analyses of the data based on demographic variables for coordinators, such as sex, age, ethnic background, and administrative experience; variables for parents would include sex, age, ethnic background, and socioeconomic level.

5. Development of an observation scale to determine the extent to which levels of involvement, as perceived by parents and administrators, agree with parents' actual participatory behaviors.

6. Consideration of the use of field-study methodology in the study of parent involvement in the decision-making process. This would entail interviewing as well as observing and analyzing the interactions between advisory council members and school administrators. In this regard, special attention should be given to eliciting participation from specific subgroups within the population under study.

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